The Connection Between Dream and Reality

While dreaming, a person actually speaks to no one. He sees no one; his eyes are closed. He does not run or walk. There are no beings before him that cause him to become frightened and flee, no lush, vast meadow whose beauty he watches, no gigantic skyscrapers from which he is afraid to look down, and no crowds of people. While the person thinks that these images exist before him, he is actually lying alone in his bed. The crowd he imagines to be around him and the tremendous noise they make never reach him in his silent room. At a moment when he imagines himself to be running rapidly, he is actually hardly moving at all. While engaged in a heated conversation with the person beside him, he is not even opening his mouth. Yet during the dream, he experiences all these things clearly. The people around him, the surroundings and the events he experiences are so realistic that during the dream he never doubts that he is actually experiencing them.

A person may dream that he has been struck by a car and may clearly perceive feelings related to it, such as fear, pain and excitement. He experiences the fear he feels as the car approaches, the manner and speed at which the car comes, and the pain that occurs in his body when it strikes him, just as in reality, and he has no doubt whatsoever about the reality of this event. The people around him rushing to the scene, the way they look at him, the clothes they wear, their reactions—everything is exceedingly realistic.



But in fact, he has experienced none of these things. No car has struck him, he has felt no pain, nor have the people around him gathered around him. In reality, no light and no sound have reached him. The concept we call the external world, and none of the causes that would bring that concept into being, exist. He is merely watching the images in his mind. He experiences feelings such as fear, pain and excitement because he watches those images in his mind, but in fact he is merely lying in his bed.

If the person were reminded while dreaming that all these things were merely a dream, he would not consider it possible and would vehemently oppose the person who said this. He would even try to convince him of the reality of what he was experiencing. For this person, the things he sees, smells, feels by touching and hears during the dream possess an absolute reality. That is why fears, joys and anxieties are very real during a dream.

The reason for this is as follows: In a dream, a person experiences all physical experiences in the same way as when he is awake. Therefore, during the dream, there is no evidence that would require him to suspect that he is dreaming.

The example of a dream is a highly effective example for proving the fact that the external world belonging to us consists merely of a perception. Just as during a dream a person cannot be convinced that what he experiences is not real, while living in this world he also cannot be convinced that this life consists solely of an image perceived in the mind. Yet the way we perceive the images we call **'real life'** is exactly the same as the way we perceive dreams. Both images form in our minds. The same activation takes place in the brain while both images are forming; the same reaction centers are activated. Therefore, there is actually no difference between the two images in terms of their formation and realism. While watching both images, we do not doubt their reality. Yet we possess real, scientific evidence that dreams are not real.

How can a person who can say, **"So what I saw was only a dream,"** when he awakens from a dream prove that what he is seeing now is not a dream? He certainly cannot prove it. That is because in both cases the person watches the same images.

God reveals this fact in His verses as follows:

"The Trumpet will be blown and at once they will be sliding from their graves towards their Lord. They will say, 'Alas for us! WHO HAS RAISED US FROM OUR RESTING-PLACE? This is what the All-Merciful promised us. The Messengers were telling the truth.'" (Surah Ya-Sin, 51-52)

When we examine it scientifically, people also live this life, which is imagined to be real life, within a dream. The moment when people will awaken from the dream will begin when their lives come to an end. Under these circumstances, the truly correct course is to accept that this world is created in the mind merely as an image, like a dream, for all people, to behave according to this truth, and to direct one's attention not to the image, but solely to God.

Professor Peter Russell of the Department of Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University compares the reality in a dream with the reality belonging to the world in which we live as follows:

> Our perception of the world has the very convincing appearance of being "out there" around us, but it is no more "out there" than are our nightly dreams. In our dreams we are aware of sights, sounds and sensations happening around us. We are aware of our bodies. We think and reason. We feel fear, anger, pleasure and love. We experience other people as separate individuals, speaking and interacting with us. The dream appears to be happening "out there" in the world around us. Only when we awaken do we realize that it was all just a dream–a creation in the mind.
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> When we say "it was all just a dream" we are referring to the fact that the experience was not based on physical reality. It was created from memories, hopes, fears, and other factors. In the waking state, our image of the world is based on sensory information drawn from our physical surroundings. This gives our waking experience a consistency and sense of reality not found in dreams. But the truth is, it is as much a creation of our minds as are our dreams.

The famous philosopher Descartes also argues that we may sometimes dream that we are performing various actions and visiting different places, only to awaken and realize that we have been lying quietly in bed. He questions whether we can ever be absolutely certain that we are not dreaming at any given moment:

> Often in my dreams I am convinced of just such familiar events – that I am sitting by the fire in my dressing-gown – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!
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> As I think about this more carefully, I realize that there is never any reliable way of distinguishing being awake from being asleep.

Of course, neither the people around us nor we ourselves, who are the possessors of our perceptions, can ever provide assurance that the life we are now living is not a dream.



When a person touches a piece of ice during a dream, he perfectly perceives its coldness, wetness and transparent appearance in his brain. When he smells a rose, he can flawlessly sense the rose's distinctive scent. The reason for this is that the same processes take place in his brain when he smells a rose in reality and when he sees it in his dream. In that case, he will be unable to know in which situation he is encountering the rose's real image and real scent. The truth of the matter is that in neither case is he encountering the real rose, and in neither case do the image or scent of the rose exist anywhere in the brain. In that case, neither of them **REPRESENTS REALITY**. Professor Gerald O'Brien described this situation in these words:

> We are asleep in our beds, our eyes are closed, yet many of us still have very vivid visual experiences. In these visual experiences, we are in a world in which there are people, events are taking place around us, and while we are having this dream, this environment somehow appears to us as though we really were in the world.
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> Now this is really important, because it shows us that our brains actually have the ability to produce the experience of seeing in the way they do in our dreams. In a general sense, this shows some philosophers and theorists working on the mind that perhaps, when we are awake and observing the world, we have a mistaken understanding. Perhaps our brains really do shape all our experiences, all our visual experiences of the world in some way, and the generally accepted belief that we are in direct contact with the world is completely wrong.

If a person knew while dreaming that he was in a dream, the car coming toward him would not frighten him. That is because he would know that the car could not harm him. Again, if a person knew that he was dreaming, he would know that the blessings and beauty he possessed would come to an end when he awoke; he would not grow arrogant. During the dream, people's negative attitudes and behavior toward him would be of no importance. That is because he would know that neither this environment nor these people were real. Since he knew that he was in a dream, he would also know that he would certainly awaken from that dream; for that reason, he would pursue no worldly ambition, would not approach worldly uneasiness, and would not seek personal interests by imagining that this life would never end. He would be certain that a real life existed outside the dream environment. For this reason, for a person who knows that he is dreaming, the environment he is in during the dream has no importance or value whatsoever.

This example given for a dream also applies to this life we are living. For a person who knows that this life is not real and is shown merely as a perception, the things he experiences and hears here concerning this world are of no importance whatsoever. That is because, just as in a dream, while living within an unreal life, he has become aware of its falsity. He now knows that the people who seek personal interests from him do not really exist and that the deceptive beauty and possessions around him are in fact merely an image. Therefore, there is no point in his becoming ambitious over the things that exist in the world or striving to obtain personal interests. He is living within a transitory dream and knows that the real life will begin after this.

Author Remez Sasson says the following on the subject:

> The world is like a movie. A person watching a movie often gets very involved with the characters and with what is happening on the screen. They become happy or sad with the heroes, depressed, shout, or laugh. If you decide to stop watching the screen at a particular moment and manage to withdraw your attention away from the movie, you will be snapped out of the illusion that the movie creates.
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> The projection machine at the cinema will project images onto the screen, but you know that it is only light projected through the film onto the screen. What is viewed on the screen is unreal, yet it is there. You may watch the movie or decide to close your eyes and ears and stop looking at the screen.
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> Have you ever watched a movie when, at some point, the reel became stuck or there was a power failure? What happens to you when you watch an interesting, absorbing film on the television and suddenly there are commercials? You get snapped out of the illusion of the world around you.
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> When you are sleeping and dreaming, and someone wakes you up, you feel thrown out of one world to a different one. It is the same in the life we call reality. It is possible to wake up from the illusion.

The world in which we live, just like dreams, is composed of imaginary scenes, imaginary scents, imaginary tastes and imaginary feelings. Of course, before this life comes to an end, anyone who wishes can awaken from this dream and see the facts. Awakening from this dream will enable one to realize that this world is not the reality and to understand that the true reality is the Hereafter. A person who comprehends the Hereafter becomes aware of the transitory nature of the world, does not allow worldly interests to deceive him, knows that he must earn God’s good pleasure in order to attain salvation in the Hereafter, and begins to live for this purpose. This is one of the truths that will bring a person endless blessings in this world and the Hereafter. In the verses, people awakened on the Day of Judgment are revealed as follows:

“The Trumpet will be blown. That is the Day of the Threat. Every self will come together with a driver and a witness: ‘YOU WERE HEEDLESS OF THIS, SO WE HAVE STRIPPED OF YOUR COVERING, AND TODAY YOUR SIGHT IS SHARP.’” (Surah Qaf, 20-22)

The fact that there is scientifically and perceptually no difference between the reality in a dream and the reality in the world ‘I am now living in’ is a great truth that will affect a person’s life. The details that become insignificant in a dream are of no importance whatsoever in this world.

References

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